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"CALAMUS," DRUM-TAPS, AND WHITMAN'S MODEL OF COMRADESHIP

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by


Charles B. Green

1996

APPROVAL SHEET

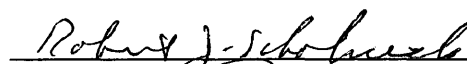
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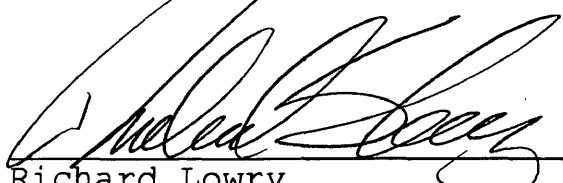
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between Whitman's "Calamus" and Drum-Taps poems, and to determine the methods by which the poet communicates what Michael Moon calls in his Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass "a program" of revising the "meaning of bodily experience" in terms of man to man affection. By man to man affection, I mean a type of affection that, as Whitman presents it, is more convincingly portrayed than the heterosexual love that is depicted in "Children of Adam." Critics have traditionally ignored connections between the "Calamus" poems and Drum-Taps, choosing rather to focus on the many differences that exist between the two sections, but in recent years important commentators such as Betsy Erkilli and Joseph Cady have suggested that a revision of this type of emphasis is in order.

Through an analysis of many of the "Calamus" poems, I will show how Whitman creates a model of "comradeship" which symbolizes a relationship of genuine, deep mutuality that only a select group may come to experience. I will then demonstrate how, in carrying this personal, erotic love of comrades with him into the crucible of the Civil War and, subsequently, into his Drum-Taps poems, Whitman is able to emerge with a new type of awareness that encompasses not only emotional and sexual attachment, but also the ideals of charity and democracy.

This analysis will, therefore, also argue that the Drum-Taps poems do not represent, as some critics claim, a desexualized modification of Whitman's earlier poetry. Instead, I will show how the poems present extensions into the public sphere of those passionate emotions exhibited within the "Calamus" group, considered by many to represent Whitman's most sexually charged poetry.

"CALAMUS," DRUM-TAPS AND WHITMAN'S MODEL OF COMRADESHIP

On January 6, 1865, Whitman wrote a letter to his friend William Douglas O'Connor in which he discussed the upcoming publication of his Drum-Taps poems.¹ He announced that these poems are

. . .in my opinion superior to Leaves of Grass--certainly more perfect as a work of art, being adjusted in all its proportions, & its passion having the indispensable merit that though to the ordinary reader let loose with wildest abandon, the true artist can see it is yet under control...

Drum Taps has none of the perturbations of Leaves of Grass.

(Correspondence, 246-47)

It is this matter of "passion...under control" that I seek to clarify. What exactly are these "perturbations" that Whitman felt necessary to exclude from Drum-Taps? If they were excluded, how did this effect his poetry? Can we assume that if Whitman associated the *absence* of "perturbations" with "passion...under control," then the presence of "perturbations" should then be associated with passion *out of control*? If this assumption is valid, then shouldn't Whitman's earlier poetry reveal passion run amuck and his Drum-Taps demonstrate emotional composure?

"Perturbations" was an astronomical term used in books and lectures on astronomy with which Whitman had been acquainted in the 1840s and 1850s. The word meant the "deviation in the principal motion of a planet or satellite caused by the gravitational power of some object less than that of the body about which the planet or satellite revolves."² For Whitman, the word "perturbation" seems to have been associated with sexual desire. In an 1870 notebook entry, for example, in which the author wrote a directive to himself "To give up absolutely and for good, from this present hour, this feverish, fluctuating, useless undignified pursuit of 164" (Whitman's code for the initials of Peter Doyle), we find the following declaration: "it is imperative, that I...remove myself...at all hazards from this incessant ...perturbation."³ These "perturbations" then, point toward a sexuality ill at ease with itself. In recent years, such critics as Joseph Cady, Robert K. Martin, and Jonathan Katz have argued that these statements, when placed within the context of various letters, poems and prose, establish that Whitman's sexual desire was of a homosexual nature. They then argue that the 1865 "perturbation" statement represents the author's recognition that his "Calamus" sentiments had revealed homosexual feelings and tendencies which he preferred to hide.⁴ The

assignment of this twentieth-century term to a nineteenth-century concern becomes somewhat problematic, however, in its potential to interpose a restricting contemporary cultural lens of modern values through which the reader sees a distorted version of Whitman's actual milieu.⁵

One method that may lead us toward more accurate perspectives involves a comparison of Whitman's "Calamus" poems, a probable location of these alleged "perturbations," with Drum-Taps which, as we have seen, Whitman considered "adjusted in all its proportions, & its passion." Traditionally, commentators have regarded the Drum-Taps poems as desexualized and devoid of what have been termed "Calamus" sentiments, but modern critics are now calling for a revision of this earlier view, suggesting that an intratextuality may exist between these groups of poems that needs to be considered.⁶ That is to say, Whitman seems to echo, respond to, and rethink his own previous texts. Thus Leaves of Grass might be said to speak to itself--one section ultimately addressing another by the time of the inclusive "Deathbed Edition." Whitman critic Jimmie Killingsworth supports this notion of intratextuality as he claims in his "Whitman's Sexual Themes During a Decade of Revision: 1860-67" that "Whitman came more and more to think of his book as a unified whole" and that "trends that appear

in. . . . 'Calamus' arise again" in Drum-Taps.⁷ Another important Whitman critic, M. Wynn Thomas, cautions that those who would gloss over this intratextuality and instead focus only on the apparent differences between the sections limit themselves. In his "Whitman and the American Democratic Identity," Wynn claims that those critics have "blinded" themselves to "important areas of feeling" and that "many of the interesting poems in Drum-Taps are consistently overlooked or at best underestimated, so that the whole pattern of the collection is falsified and its character misunderstood."⁸

The following comparison of these two groups of poetry will illustrate how the "Calamus" section establishes a model of "comradeship" (a process by which love between men may triumph over isolation and death) and how this model is, in fact, echoed and modified in Drum-Taps as it serves as the vehicle for a continuation, rather than desexualization, of Whitman's poetic experiment. In demonstrating this, I intend to show how this continuation and modification of Whitman's "Calamus" sentiments, or passions, in some sense, explains and justifies the author's 1865 "perturbation" statement.

As I have suggested, Whitman's model of comradeship involves a process by which a specific type of affection

(same-sex as opposed to opposite-sex love) may transcend conditions of isolation and separation. This process is constructed within the "Calamus" group as several specific components join together and interact over the collection of poems, and is then repeated within the Drum-Taps section. It may be helpful to think about these components in light of the following schematic framework I have devised:

1. The pronouncement
2. The confession
3. The assembly
4. The bestowal
5. The prerequisites
6. The identification
7. The warning
8. The promise
9. The sacrifice
10. The vision

Although several of these components appear within the 1855 and 1856 versions of Leaves of Grass, this model is first fully developed within the poems of the "Calamus" cluster:

Mind you the timid models of the rest, the
majority ?
Long I minded them, but hence I will not--for
I have adopted models for myself, and now
offer them to The Lands.
(Leaves 1860, 364; emphasis added)

One of these "adopted models" that the poet now offers to the "Lands" is symbolized and presided over by the phallic calamus root, a tall and hardy spear of swamp grass. This

"Calamus" model "focuses on the theme of adhesiveness, which Whitman described as 'Intense and loving comradeship, the personal attachment of man to man.'"⁹ This "adhesiveness" establishes the foundation of the model of comradeship.

With the foundation in place, the poet makes his "pronouncement," proclaiming that he will speak for "comrades" and that as their spokesman, he will "tell the secret."¹⁰ This pronouncement and vow establish the first components of the model and, in support of them, the poet asks in poem no. 4, "who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow and joy?"¹¹ A scene is then depicted in which the speaker becomes the central figure of a Dionysian-like celebration with the calamus root serving as an ersatz thyrsus. The figure, like the wild-flowers and vines that emerge from underneath "the old stones" (perhaps symbolizing the pressing weight of social conformity), appears "Far, far in the forest" and is encircled by a crowd on whom he bestows certain tokens of his affection, reserving the calamus root for those that love as he loves. We are thereby informed that only those comrades who discern the secret will possess that "growth" that is conceived in the "margins." The "Calamus" confession then, is primarily for those whose love embraces desires that exist in the margins and are similar to those of the "Calamus" speaker. The

bestowal of this confession among members of the assembly therefore becomes dependent upon certain prerequisites.

With the first five of the ten components in place, the "Calamus" persona steps back for a moment, reflecting upon experiences with same-sex desires. In "Calamus" poem no. 1 he reveals that the affections that he once relegated to the margins of his existence ultimately "escaped" their boundaries. After this had occurred, everything became much clearer to him. He can now acknowledge that his soul rejoices in manly attachment and he is "no longer abash'd" to admit that this attraction is strong upon him.¹² He recognizes that the "music" of manly affection had always played around him, but that "untaught," he had not been able to hear its strong melody: "But now the chorus I hear, and am elated."¹³ In response to this revelation he is "resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment" which will bring his message and model of comradeship to those who remain untaught:¹⁴

To the young man, many things to absorb, to
 engraft, to develop, I teach, to help him
 become élève of mine,
 But if blood like mine circle not in his
 veins,
 If he be not silently selected by lovers, and
 do not silently select lovers,
 Of what use is it that he seek to become élève
 of mine?

(Leaves 1860, 377)

Again, as we saw in poem no. 4 in which the calamus root is reserved for those that love as the "Calamus" confessor loves, a prerequisite is invoked limiting access to the secret of comrades. Here we are informed that in order to become an "élève of mine," one must have "blood like mine." Characteristics of this "blood" are elucidated in several "Calamus" poems: in poem no. 36, for example, it is "something fierce and terrible" that is "eligible to burst forth"¹⁵; in poem no. 14 it is an internal consuming flame that causes one to burn; and in poem no. 43 it is a "subtle electric fire."¹⁶ All of these metaphors suggest a powerful passion flaming forth, but like an uncontrolled flame, this image of desire threatens to consume. The "Calamus" poet is certainly aware of the danger associated with the smoldering passion of man to man desire, but he also recognizes that, in Foucauldian terms, the danger makes it sexier. This passion allows him to move away from his general audience toward the intimate reader/lover who, because of similar same-sex affinities, will understand his message. As Whitman sends his expression of love outward, he offers his song with the hope that others will respond and that a dialogue will be established between him and the reader: "Among the men and women, the multitude, I perceive one picking me out by secret and divine signs,/ . . .Some are baffled--But that

one is not--that one knows me."¹⁷

This sixth component of Whitman's model of comradeship proposes that members of the "brotherhood of lovers" share certain recognizable "signs." Comrades, the poet explains in poem no. 18, are able to identify one another even in the city's rushing crowds with a mere "flash of eyes."¹⁸ Even as strangers, when they pass one another on the street, they have but to give "the pleasure" of each other's "eyes, face," and "flesh" in order to initiate a process of recognition.¹⁹ All that is required, the poet writes in poem no. 29, is "a glimpse" to inaugurate the genesis of a perfect union between lovers in which "two, content, happy in being together," will not need to speak, "perhaps not a word."²⁰ While the flame of manly affection can serve as a beacon for lovers, the poet submits a warning to the reader/lover that it can also act as a destructive force:

The way is suspicious--the result slow,
uncertain, may-be destructive.
(Leaves 1860, 344)

As a human being who has endured the marginal existence experienced by one whose passions and desires deviate from societal norms, the "Calamus" persona is presented as if he has known the pain of sexual self-alienation and repression, and wants to point out the possibly devastating effects that

may be encountered by those who harbor the need of comrades.

One effect that is specifically identified deals with the risk of isolation and loneliness. In poem no. 20, the look of the live-oak, "rude, unbending, lusty," leads the speaker to think of himself.²¹ Like the calamus root, the free standing oak functions as a phallic symbol, draped in a pubic-like covering of downy moss that generates thoughts of manly love within the speaker. This in turn, invokes the fear of loneliness that such affection threatens to produce. An aversion to being alone is, in fact, reiterated throughout the "Calamus" cluster. Poem no. 10, for instance, speaks of many "lonesome walks" and "pensive" nights spent "sleepless and dissatisfied."²²

As this warning is delivered to the potential follower of same-sex love, the speaker goes on to describe other effects in terms of a tortured mixture of passion and despair, and he confesses that he has often experienced a "sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him."²³ In poem no. 6, he presents a delineation of attributes that one may expect to experience if he indulges in the love of comrades: a heaving breast, rage dissatisfied, ill-suppressed sighs, broken oaths, broken promises, and hungry wishes.²⁴ This list is continued in poem no. 9: "Hours...long, sore and heavy-

hearted,...sleepless, ...discouraged, distracted,...sullen and suffering,... hours of torment,... dejected."²⁵ He additionally warns the prospective follower that these by-products of manly affection are not the exclusive property of periods of isolation, but may strike even in the company of comrades: "Sometimes with one I love I fill myself with rage, for /fear I effuse unreturn'd love."²⁶

After indicating that manly affection and uncontrolled passion can produce frustrating and even harmful effects, he then mediates this scenario of suffering with the ultimate possibility of a union experienced between two lovers that surpasses that experienced by lovers engaged in more conventional types of relationships. Before this union can occur, the "Calamus" lover must be prepared to experience a metaphorical death in life in which the social self is sacrificed to the exclusiveness of same-sex passion:

You would have to give up all else--I
 alone would expect to be your God,
 sole and exclusive,
 Your novitiate would even then be long and ex-
 hausting,
 The whole past theory of your life, and all
 conformity to the lives around you, would
 have to be abandoned.

(Leaves 1860, 345)

If one is willing to experience this passing away of the former self and to endure the trials that are attached to a

same-sex relationship, the poet offers a promise of blissful contentment:

O Love!
 O dying--always dying!
 O the burials of me, past and present!
 O me, while I stride ahead, material,
 visible, imperious as ever!
 O me, what I was for years, now dead,
 (I lament not--I am content;)
 (Leaves 1860, 369-70)

The reader/lover must enter into a relationship of surrender and sacrifice in which the poet offers to serve as teacher and guide. If the follower will "put lips upon...the new husband and...comrade," he will be guided through a process (the model of comradeship) during which a union may be formed that will last "eternally."²⁷

The poet counters the prospect that we may, after all, be "deluded" about existence beyond the grave and that the after-life may be but a "beautiful fable only" with the promise of a state of perfect satisfaction that may be attained here on earth. This state, he informs us in poem no. 7, lies in an elevating union among lovers:

When he whom I love travels with me, or sits a
 long while holding me by the hand,
 When the subtle air, the impalpable, the sense
 that words and reason hold not, surround
 us and pervade us,
 Then I am charged with untold and untellable
 wisdom--I am silent--I require nothing
 further,

I cannot answer the question of appearances,
 or that of identity beyond the grave,
 But I walk or sit indifferent--I am satisfied,
 He ahold of my hand has completely satisfied
 me.

(Leaves 1860, 353)

This is the promise of comradeship--a state of being in which one is "completely satisfied" and requires "nothing further"--that Whitman extends to a "brotherhood of lovers." True happiness is not to be found, as the poet proposes in poem no. 11, in fame, in carousing, in success, in perfect health, or in the beauty of nature. The mere thought that one's lover is on his way, however, is enough to sweeten "each breath," to enhance the sustenance received from each bite of food, and to inject each day with joyous anticipation for the moment when his lover will "lay sleeping" with him "under the same cover."²⁸ Even the expectation of such a union, we are promised, contains the potential to heighten all experience. This is the crux and the celebration of the "Calamus" message. As Robert K. Martin argues,

It is not a mindless celebration, oblivious to the inevitability of death, the possible failure of love, or ultimate human isolation. But it is a celebration in poem after poem as Whitman celebrates, calmly but with deep joy, the pleasure of being together with a lover, and again and again asserts that this pleasure exceeds fame or worldly success. He proposes love, specifically love between men, as a

response to, and triumph over, isolation and death.²⁹

The speaker in poem no. 32 affirms that the poet has not taken up his pen to record the splendors of battle, to write of history, or to trumpet the city that he inhabits, but rather to celebrate the union fashioned between two comrades who share a passionate bond.³⁰ It is this celebration that the poet wishes to articulate with his "Calamus" poems, his "last words" which, while acknowledging that they may be considered "the most baffling," he suggests hold the potential to expose him more than all his other poems.³¹ This implication of future revelations, or a type of poetic bequest, is further suggested in the final "Calamus" poem as the speaker addresses his words "to one a century hence or any number of centuries hence" and to those "yet unborn."³²

The poet's wish to leave this legacy, his "immortal reverberations" of comrades, is demonstrated in poem no. 2:

Come, I am determined to unbare this broad
 breast of mine--I have long enough stifled
 and choked;
 Emblematic and capricious blades, I leave you--
 now you serve me not,
 Away! I will say what I have to say, by
 itself.

(Leaves 1860, 343)

His "Calamus" poems will become the "Tomb-leaves" that rise

up "above death" embodying the poet's message. It is this message that denies death, and the messenger celebrates this fact:

Perennial roots, tall leaves--O the winter
 shall not freeze you, delicate leaves,
 Every year shall you bloom again--Out from
 where you retired, you shall emerge again.
 (Leaves 1860, 342)

Despite the emotional hardships and the winter-like hostility of society towards man-to-man affection, the poet affirms that this affection cannot easily be destroyed, not even in death. As the buried corpse nourishes the leaves that rise above it, so the poet's message will nourish his book of leaves until the time arrives when its songs can be realized. The "secret" of comrades will one day be exposed and "bloom" with "immortal reverberations through the States." For the present, however, this secret will remain in the margins where it has been growing--where the calamus roots grow, withdrawn from society where man-to-man affection can flourish in a sexually liberating union of love and death:

Yet you are beautiful to me you faint-tinged
 roots--you make me think of Death,
 Death is beautiful from you-- (what indeed is
 finally beautiful except death and love?)
 O I think it is not for life I am chanting
 here my chant of lovers-- I think it must
 be for Death.

(Leaves 1860, 343)

This poem suggests that in living, the lover of comrades is exposed to the psychological turmoil of same-sex love, but death, on the other hand, holds out the possibility of a permanent state in which beautiful love may be realized. In other words, the poet envisions an ideal situation in which he may fully celebrate and experience that part of himself that he has for so long had to conceal. It is the repression of manly love that is the destroyer of comrades, rather than its expression. As E. Fred Carlisle has put it,

Instead of presenting life as creative and death as destructive, he thinks of life--*as he has suffered it*--as psychologically destructive, and he views death--as he regards it aesthetically--as essentially creative. Love and death are the same then--creative, liberating, and fulfilling. They become a means to self-transcendence, yet at the same time they provide a way to recover and liberate Whitman's essential self.³³

Through the act of unbaring his broad chest and revealing his hidden passions, the "Calamus" speaker therefore offers himself as a martyr-like figure whose artistic expression will bloom after his death, gaining a permanency of art (he hopes) for those who can recognize the "blossoms" of his passionate blood. He predicts that his message will help to "dissipate" the "entire show of appearance" which denies and makes "ashamed" those that yearn for manly affection and for

whom, as societal lepers, "love and death" have become synonymous.

This theme of heroically embracing death and sacrificing one's self for the cause of comradeship, one of the culminating components of the model, is illustrated in poem no. 15 as the speaker's confession metaphorically becomes the life blood that is poured out upon the page in service of manly affection. Within these poems he has opened the "blue veins...conceal'd" within his breast and poured forth "candid...red drops" now made "free" from "whence" they "were prison'd." The poem suggests that although these drops presently "stain every page...ashamed and wet," one day they will "glisten" and "glow," revealing the "scarlet heat" of same-sex passion as an example to lovers. These "blushing drops" are shed in a sacrificial dissolution so that through them, all may "be seen" and all may "know."³⁴

Although Drum-Taps raises those who valiantly lay down their lives for their country and its cause to the level of heroic, the poems also exalt those that lay their lives down for love of their fellow man. This ascendancy of heroic sacrificial love over more conventional aspirations, such as fame and fortune, is asserted in poem no. 28. True heroism, according to the poem, may be found among the "brotherhood of lovers" that fights "long and long," through

"youth, ...middle... and old age," against "odium." Heroic comrades are those who face the "dangers" of life together and remain "unfaltering," "affectionate," and "faithful" even as they face the possibility of being "conquer'd" and the ultimate sacrifice, death. The valor of these brothers rests not only upon their devotion to their duty and country, but upon their sacrifice and devotion to one another.³⁵

Included in this "Calamus" message and its cause of comrades is the ultimate vision of a day in which "faint indirections" will no longer be necessary. In poem no. 5 the speaker foresees a day in which manly lovers will be able to greet one another openly with kisses to the lips and when the love of comrades will spread across the nation solving "every one of the problems of freedom." He describes how a new model "shall circulate through The States" making it "customary in all directions, in the houses and streets, to see manly affection."³⁶ In this light, the poet's message of comradeship can be seen to extend not only beyond the grave, but as "an example to lovers, to take permanent shape and will through The States."³⁷

Whitman's model of comradeship, then, can be seen working on at least two levels--personal and social--with both levels sharing a call for unity. The first level calls for a merging of individual lovers in a deeply personal

union. On the second level, there is the call for a host of such attachments that will create a communal sense that will help a dividing nation cohere again and create a Democracy rooted in a "brotherhood of lovers." Betsy Erkkila, in Whitman the Political Poet, supports the notion that this duality is exhibited in many of the "Calamus" poems:

. . .Whitman moves away from the pond side and back to the center of American culture, legitimizing his calamus emotions as part of the public culture of democracy and as a means of welding the divided nation. His comrades and lovers become, in effect, republican freemen in the affectionate dress of phrenological adhesiveness.³⁸

Whitman, writing in his 1871 *Democratic Vistas*, discussed this second aspect of his model of comradeship:

Intense and loving comradeship, the personal and passionate attachment of man to man-- which, hard to define, underlies the lessons and ideals of the profound saviors of every land and age, and which seems to promise, when thoroughly develop'd, cultivated and recognized in manners and literature, the most substantial hope and safety of the future of these States, will then be fully express'd.
(Prose Works II, 414)

Thus, if one is to accept this duality, Whitman must be seen as proposing a future form of democracy based upon an extending web of manly affection.

The "Calamus" model and its message of comradeship,

therefore, encompasses much more than an emotional or sexual attachment. His message includes ideals of charity, democracy, and equality. The focus of "Calamus" gradually moves from the intimate and personal to the interplay between the individual and the aggregate society. His "Calamus" message calls for embracing a new type of friendship extended to the human race. Again, in the sense of duality, the kiss of one man upon the lips of another is not meant to be viewed solely in sexual terms, but as a gesture of friend to friend, democrat to democrat, human being to human being. As Carla Verdino-Süllwold and Thomas Hampson have stated, this kiss represents

...the love of comrades--of men loving other men, but even more importantly, of men loving mankind, of the solidarity and brotherhood of those striving together as kindred spirits. And for those souls who resist the confines of convention, the fetters of the parlor, and who insist on an energetic, unique expression of love that defies any boundaries, be they sexual, political, or spiritual, the poems become an affirmation of the right of the democratic whole to be comprised of innumerable unique parts which somehow--through solidarity and love--coalesce.³⁹

Rather than restricting "perturbations" to what the modern word "homosexuality" implies, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider them instead as indications of complex, constricted passions and sexuality straining

against the bridles of social convention. Michael Moon, who often celebrates what he sees as an absolute affirmation of male-homoerotic love in Whitman's poetry, argues that Whitman's "Calamus" poems represent attempts by Whitman to release "prohibited desires. . . .from encryption." He finds it necessary, however, to qualify this view by noting that his desire for release does not merely reflect an attempted escape from "homophobic tyranny." Whitman's "far-reaching and revisionary politics," he admits, are "fraught with difficulties, including the always-present threat of persecution and reprisal exerted by the dominant culture."⁴⁰ Within the brief "Calamus" cluster, Whitman's own words reveal emotions that fluctuate along a tumultuous, untrodden path probing dejection, frustration and isolation, as well as joy, contentment, and fulfillment. The poems move from private to public, jumping from the margins of the pond-side to a vision of a newly ordered democracy exploring the possibilities of love and life as well as the probabilities of despair and death. As we have seen, then, the "Calamus" poems do periodically exhibit passions that could be considered to be, in Whitman's own accounting, far from "under control."

Whitman's "Calamus" poems should be viewed *primarily* as an impassioned celebration, yet rejection of the

constricting confines of the shadowy pond-side. This does not imply a rejection of earlier passions and affections, but rather the poet's attempt to establish a model of comradeship that is defined as a "brotherhood" of men seeking the realization of man to man attachment in the public "life that exhibits itself." His poems suggest that these comrades run the risk of experiencing hardship and suffering and follow an "uncertain, perhaps a destructive" path, but if they are willing to endure, they face the promise of achieving a liberating union of love and death that will contribute to the realization of a new democracy. This is the matrix of "comradeship" that is extended into the public sphere of his Drum-Taps poems--that of the soldier-comrade.

Despite the terrible effects that he must have realized that a civil war would produce, Whitman looked forward to the possibility that the crisis between the states would address what he saw as conditions of stagnation and misdirection within the development of the nation and democracy.⁴¹ Rejoicing in the commencement of hostilities, he saw the conflict as the clearest signal by the North that it found the undemocratic character of the feudalistic slave-owning aristocracy of the South unacceptable. This uncompromising stance filled Whitman with the hope that the

North was finally repudiating similar traits in its own character and that the war represented the essential prelude to a rebirth in which a reunification of the North and South would signal the rise of a genuine democratic nation. As a product of this enthusiasm, he initially produced a group of poems in 1861 and early 1862 whose characteristic tone is one of hectic anticipation in which the coming war is idealized and almost embraced.⁴²

As the intensity of the conflict grew, however, and Whitman came into contact with the harsh realities and the stress of witnessing intense human suffering on a massive scale, his poems became more complex and less bellicose. By applying his model of comradeship to the extreme conditions he witnessed as the nation faced its greatest moment of crisis, Whitman was able to revisit his "Calamus" sentiments and to complete their movement from the pond-side, bringing them out into the open in a modified form. Drum-Taps became the new vehicle by which Whitman advances his poetic experiment to a higher level: celebrating the love of comrades--of men loving other men, but even more importantly, of men loving mankind, of the solidarity and brotherhood of those striving together as kindred spirits. In this manner, Drum-Taps--once it was incorporated into Leaves of Grass--can be viewed as an intratextual comment on

his earlier poetry. Although Drum-Taps reflects a striking realism and a higher concern with the political realm, as well as a definite move away from the type of utopian fantasy constructed in "Calamus," at its core it shares a framework constructed from the some model components of manly affection and love that formerly haunted the shadows of the pond-side.

Just as the poet of "Calamus" poem no.1, who proclaims himself speaker "for all" and announces that he will, for the love of comrades, reveal the secret, the Drum-Taps poet of "Shut Not Your Doors to Me Proud Libraries" offers, for the "love of comrades," to bring that which "was lacking among you all, yet needed most."⁴³ Again, as in "Calamus," the poet makes a pronouncement, declaring himself the qualified speaker of comrades. The "Calamus" singer who declared himself "resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment" will continue his song in Drum-Taps as he celebrates "manly life in the camp."⁴⁴

The confessional aspect of Whitman's model becomes evident in Drum-Taps as the poet resumes his chant. In "As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado," the speaker's "confession" is released into "the "open air." With his head in his "camerado's" lap, he acknowledges the "danger" of his message, that it is "full of death," but he is firm in his

resolve to affirm his vision of a brotherhood among men in the face of a hostile world. Terms within the poem evoke images of a battle ("weapons," "danger," "death," "victorious," "defeated"), but it is a battle the poet is willing to fight and he throws caution to the wind: "I heed not."⁴⁵ Significantly, this confession is offered *outside* of the "margins." The conditions created by the war have allowed the poet to complete his movement away from the fantasy realm of the pond-side and now, in a completely public and corporeal sphere, he can address a new type of assembly.

The crowd that we see gathered in "The Wound-Dresser" is unlike the troop that we observed in "Calamus" poem no. 4. The soldiers that surround the poet are not mere spirits, but substantive figures who reside outside of poem no. 4's dream-like "gates." The poet, now "an old man bending," has matured along with his earlier sentiments of affection, and the "tokens" that he now bestows (the fourth component) among the soldiers are physical and real:

An old man bending, I come, among new faces,
 (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have
 cross'd and rested,
 Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded
 lips.)

(Drum Taps 34)

Like the "Calamus" speaker who seeks to legitimize his authority by asking "who but I should understand lovers and all their sorrow and joy?", the Drum-Taps speaker now asks "who except myself has yet conceived what your children en-masse really are?"⁴⁶ Whitman again takes on the role of teacher/guide as he urges his dear camerado, the reader/lover, to escape the confines of conventionality and to embrace an uncertain but potentially exhilarating future.

The poet realizes that a battle against the "majorities" cannot be won without a united front and so he relies upon his model of comradeship to generate support for his cause. For instance, standing within the crowds, the Drum-Taps speaker seeks out with "signs" those of similar sympathies. In "Give Me the Splendid Silent Sun," he announces his rejection of the lures of the countryside and wilderness for the city in which he encounters "forever faces" of manly affection:

Give me interminable eyes....give me
 comrades and lovers by the thousand!
 Let me see new ones every day! let me hold new
 ones by the hand every day!
 (Drum Taps, 48)

Clearly, the poet's passion for manly affection remains just as robust as his ability to recognize his "comrades." In "How Solemn as One by One," the poet describes how, as he

stands and watches a procession of men passing by, he considers each "mask" in his search for a "kindred soul."⁴⁷ We find this mode of identification, the sixth component, re-occurring throughout the Drum-Taps poems and in "O Tan-Faced Prairie-Boy," we become privy to the emotional response of the poet upon one such identification: "You came, taciturn, with nothing to give--we but look'd on each other,/ When lo! more than all the gifts of the world you gave me."⁴⁸

As he made clear in several of his "Calamus" poems, the poet of "Did you ask Dulcet Rhymes From Me?" notes that not everyone will recognize the signs or hear the songs. In order for one to fully understand the message of comradeship, we are reminded, certain prerequisites are necessary. The poet's vision of humanity is certainly not for those who wish to be lulled. For those who seek conventionality, the poet has but one message:

What to such as you, anyhow, such a poet as I?
 --therefore leave my works,
 And go lull yourself with what you can
 understand;
 For I lull nobody--and you will never
 understand me.

(Drum Taps, 50)

This message may appear somewhat harsh, but as noted earlier, the poet is leading his camerado into an abyss of uncertainty which we know to encompass suffering and pain,

and, as his model requires, he wants to make this warning plain. We should not forget, however, what the poet has promised those who are willing to endure the sacrifice that he associates with same-sex love--the sympathetic bond between lovers that allows them to move beyond conventional relationships.

There appears to be, however, something altered within the poet's outlook. Exposed to the raw carnage of a modern war machine, a modification of the poet's earlier affirmation and promise of a transcending union between comrades has occurred. His triumphant songs have become tempered by the whirl of war and death: "No poem proud, I chanting bring to thee, nor mastery's rapturous verse,/ But a cluster containing night's darkness and blood-dripping wounds,/ And psalms of the dead."⁴⁹ The suffering and sacrifice that precedes or accompanies the ultimate union between "Calamus" lovers has been distinctly extended to incorporate those that have died for fellow man and country. Death now provides the legitimate context in which the loving affection of men may be released and celebrated. Earlier, in "Calamus" poem no. 4, Whitman imagined a great crowd encircling him made up of "dear friends dead" and "spirits." The "crowd" that surrounds the poet in the Drum-Taps poems is, in many ways, similar to this "Calamus"

troop, only the soldier-comrades are literary representations grounded in the sweat and blood of lived experience. Where the suffering experienced by the "Calamus" crowd is inflicted primarily upon the emotions, and death, when implied, is primarily metaphorical, the Drum-Taps soldier is exposed physically, and death for him is not merely rhetorical.

Many of the poems within Drum-Taps express emotions that serve to demonstrate subtle connections to the "Calamus" cluster and the modification of its message. Drum-Taps begins, much like "Calamus," with an impassioned call to young men. The reverberations of the drums in "Beat! Beat! Drums!," like the "life that does not exhibit itself," are "strong" upon those that hear its rhythm, but in Drum-Taps, these reverberations often signal impending death. In "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," for example, a poem to a fallen "comrade," we recognize, in miniature, the model of comradeship beginning with the "signs" shared between those with similar same-sex affinities: "One look I but gave, which your dear eyes return'd." Although the poem appears to be a lament of a father for a dead son, Byrne Fone, in the "Words Unsaid" chapter of his Masculine Landscapes: Walt Whitman and the Homoerotic Text, points out that when the poet speaks "about a 'boy of responding

kisses,' implicit therein is the presumption that most boys do not respond to the kisses of men and boys who do are 'men like me,' who, like those in *Calamus* 4, love 'as I am capable of loving.'"⁵⁰ The poem's message, then, suggests that comradeship provides an element of value in the midst of a terribly destructive world. The young man has been slaughtered and the speaker has endured a deeply personal loss. The speaker realizes, however, that he has shared a reciprocal love that functioned to sustain the two of them even in a time of the most intense trial and thus enabled them to extract something of significance even from war. The surviving comrade will remember both the relationship he shared and the death that deprived him of his "dear comrade." The boy's death, therefore, is eclipsed by the love of comrades and the vigil will be remembered as "Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet... / Vigil of silence, love and death."⁵¹

This merging of love and death, fulfillment and loss, litters the fields of Drum-Taps just as the soldiers littered the hospital wards that Whitman frequented throughout the war. In "Hymn of Dead Soldiers," for example, the poet presents a "chant" for "Phantoms," "unseen by the rest," which gather around as he celebrates their lives and their deaths:

Sweet are the blooming cheeks of the living!
 sweet are the musical voices sounding!
 But sweet, ah sweet, are the dead, with their
 silent eyes.

Dearest comrades ! all now is over;
 But love is not over--and what love, O
 comrades!
 Perfume from battle-fields rising--up from
 fætor arising.

(Drum-Taps 59-60)

Again, as in "Vigil Strange," there is the suggestion of a death-defying love that has the power to make some sense of the loss of these "dead soldiers." Their deaths, sacrifices not only for the political purposes of preserving the union, but also for the brotherhood of comrades and a future democracy, "perfume the battlefields" as they come to symbolize the immortality of lives which carry the "wholesome" fragrance of heroic deeds. What had previously existed only in the margins and which once threatened society's settled views, is now transformed into something wholesome and heroic.

In "A Sight in Camp in the Day-Break Grey and Dim," this heroic sacrifice approaches a spiritual level when the poet, as he looks upon the face of a fallen comrade, envisions the image of Christ:

Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought
 out there, untended lying,

.

Curious, I halt, and silent stand;
 Then with light fingers I from the face of the
 nearest, the first, just lift the blanket:
 Who are you, elderly man so gaunt and grim, with
 well-grey'd hair, and flesh all
 sunken about the eyes?
 Who are you, my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step--And who are you, my
 child and darling?
 Who are you, sweet boy, with cheeks yet
 blooming?

Then to the third--a face not child, nor old, very
 calm, as of beautiful yellow-white
 ivory:
 Young man I think I know you--I think this face
 of yours is the face of the Christ
 himself;
 Dead and divine, and brother of all, and here
 again he lies.

(Drum-Taps 46)

The three fallen soldiers present a synthesis of the
 "brotherhood of lovers" the poet describes in "Calamus" poem
 no. 28. In that poem, the real "heroes" are those that fight
 the long battle through "youth,...middle ...and old age"
 against "odium," yet remain "unfaltering," "affectionate," and
 "faithful" to one another even as they face death. Now, in "A
 Sight in Camp," the poet is confronted with representatives
 from each of these age groups, "youth,...middle ...and old
 age," lying together, "faithful" even *in death*. The fact that
 they have died together as comrades not only suggests their
 loyalty and heroism, but also celebrates an ascension over
 life accomplished through their Christ-like suffering and

sacrifice. The poet suggests that these men, like Christ, sacrificed themselves for their comrades and for humanity, and in so doing, have become transfigured in their deaths.

This feeling of intense sympathy for fallen comrades is not limited only to those who fought for the North.

Whitman's model of comradeship, as the "Calamus" poems demonstrate, is all-embracing and in the poem "Reconciliation," he extends its transfiguring power to his "enemy." The poet foresees a future in which "the hands of the sisters Death and Night" will wash across the "soil'd" world, ending its "deeds of carnage." Comrades, each divine, will be reconciled by a mere touch of the "lips."⁵²

This offer of reconciliation is further extended to the cause of democracy in a poem which earlier appeared, with the exception of the first and last lines, as "Calamus" poem no. 5. This borrowing not only reflects the kinship between the two groups of poems, but also suggests that Whitman hoped that the "Calamus" sentiment of affection would become a cohering principle that would help to reconcile a divided nation:

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten'd--Affection shall solve the
 problems of Freedom yet;
Those who love each other shall become
 invincible,
They shall yet make Columbia victorious.

Sons of the Mother of All! you shall yet be
victorious!
You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all
the remainder of the earth.

(Drum-Taps 49)

The poem "Over the Carnage Rose Prophetic a Voice" envisions a future in which brothers of the North and the South shall join together in comradeship, thus presenting a model that will spread across the nation transforming democracy in its wake. The "perfume" of those fallen comrades will waft "beyond death" and it shall become "customary in the houses and the streets to see manly affection." The prophetic voice, declaring the invincibility of "Affection," announces the birth of a new society and democracy modeled upon the equality of lovers and unselfish acts of sacrifice. The poet, animated by this promise of comradeship, is not satisfied with the transformation of his nation alone. Looking forward into an uncertain future, he envisions the model of comradeship sweeping around the world to encompass all of humanity:

I see not America only--I see not only
Liberty's nation but other nations
preparing;
I see tremendous entrances and exits--I see new
combinations--I see the solidarity of
races.

(Drum-Taps 53)

The poet asserts that if the future he envisions, first

within his "Calamus" and then within Drum-Taps, is to become manifest, then it will not be accomplished by the deeds of the aristocracy or by those that cling to inhibiting and limiting social structures, but by the "average man," the comrade who, advancing invincibly toward the horizon and enduring all hardships, has become transfigured and is "more like a God."⁵³

Whitman's model of comradeship is complete when, like the "Calamus" speaker who experienced the mystical union between equal lovers and becomes "charged with untold and untellable wisdom" that leaves him "silent," the Drum-Taps speaker achieves a moment of rapturous fulfillment: "Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you dearest comrade--Not a tear, not a word."⁵⁴ These "mystic hours," however, end in a burial ritual in which the speaker's trance-like attention to detail suggests an almost perfect state of emotional control:

Vigil for comrade swiftly slain--vigil I never
 forget, how as day brighten'd,
 I rose from the chill ground, and folded my
 soldier well in his blanket,
 And buried him where he fell.

(Drum-Taps 43)

This state of emotional control returns us full circle to one of our original starting points--the issue of passion in Whitman's Drum-Taps poems.

As I have argued, Whitman establishes a model of comradeship in his "Calamus" poems with which he celebrates same-sex bonds--the deep joy that may be achieved between two lovers of similar sympathies. As we have seen, this model, while not oblivious to the possible failures of love, the likelihood of human isolation, and the inevitability of death, asserts that love, specifically love between men, may ultimately exceed fame and worldly success and that it has the potential to overcome isolation and death. This model is carried on throughout Drum-Taps where, in the presence of wounded soldiers, the poet can more openly express his personal as well as political affections. His vocation as "wound-dresser" allows him to move among young men, kissing them and sharing meaningful moments of satisfaction without the fear of public disapproval. The context of the war then, and the struggle to define the future course of democracy, permitted Whitman a relatively open expressiveness in his Drum-Taps and the opportunity to merge the private and personal with the social and political.

Although many critics have claimed that Whitman's Drum-Taps poems are either devoid of "Calamus" sentiments or contain them in a sublimated form, we have seen that, on the contrary, the poems are permeated by Whitman's model of comradeship and his language of manly affection with which

he continues his passionate "Calamus" sentiments. Joseph Cady, for example, challenges the standard critical assumption that Whitman's war poems are a sublimation of his sexuality. Instead, he argues that the motif of wartime comradeship gave Whitman a self-protective context in which to express his "Calamus" affections.⁵⁵ "As I Lay with My Head in Your Lap Camerado" seems a clear example of the poet's continuing "Calamus" sentiments while other poems reveal that the measure of the poet's passion remains undiminished and ever-present. Betsy Erkkila recognizes this and in her Whitman the Political Poet notes that "in the poems of Drum-Taps the lover of the 'Calamus' poems becomes the soldier-comrade."⁵⁶ We can clearly see that as the speaker in "The Wound-Dresser" moves about the wounded men he reveals that deep in his breast, a fire, "a burning flame," resides alongside the many kisses he has collected upon his "bearded lips."⁵⁷

The poetry that Whitman produced before the war, restricted by societal conventions to the realm of the metaphorical pond-side, does exhibit passions straining within their confines, while the poetry of Drum-Taps, under the influence of "many a solemn day and many a savage scene," tempered by the realities encountered in a war environment, and mediated by a fulfilling contact shared

among comrades, can be seen in many cases to demonstrate a state of almost perfect emotional control. This view does not suggest that the impassioned flame burning within "Calamus" that ignites "electric fires" is now absent, but merely that the flame appears to be "under control." Present in both groups of poems, Whitman's passion and sexuality should be viewed as having been channelled within an environment in which the poet's manly affections are easily expressed and his vision of a "City of Friends" with its transforming form of democracy is, to some extent, realized. As Whitman fashioned his Drum-Taps, his poems naturally reflected this partial realization and, in turn, came to formulate an intratextual response, "adjusted in all its proportions & its passion," to sentiments which had previously remained relegated to the "Calamus" pond-side.

NOTES

1. Drum-Taps was first published in 1865 as a distinct volume of seventy-two pages and fifty-three poems. Eighteen more poems, including the famous Lincoln elegy, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," were published as "Sequel to Drum-Taps" and bound into a five hundred copy second issue. In 1867, Drum-Taps was bound into Leaves of Grass and appeared in successive editions as a section. Of the fifty-three Drum-Taps poems of 1865, only twenty-nine are retained in the final 1881 grouping and of the eighteen poems of the "Sequel," only nine are retained. I have used F. De Wolfe Miller's 1865 Drum-Taps facsimile almost exclusively and for the purpose of consistency, will refer to the grouping as "Drum-Taps."

2. Joseph Beaver, Walt Whitman, Poet of Science (New York, 1951), 55-56.

3. Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, The Solitary Singer (1955; repr., with revisions, New York: New York University Press, 1967), 421-22.

4. See, for example, Joseph Cady's "Drum-Taps and Homosexual Literature" in Walt Whitman Here and Now, Joann P. Krieg, ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 50. For a discussion of what has been termed Whitman's radical homosexual vision in *Calamus*, see Joseph Cady, "Not Happy in the Capitol: Homosexuality and the Calamus Poems," *American Studies*, 19 (Fall 1978), 5-22; and Robert K. Martin The Homosexual Tradition in American Poetry (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 47-89. In Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A. (New York: Crowell, 1976), Jonathan Katz discusses Whitman's central place in the quest for identity and freedom among nineteenth-century male homosexuals.

5. James E. Miller, Jr., for example, argues that spiritual love, rather than sexual love, is the central focus of *Calamus*. See "Calamus: The Leaf and the Root," in A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 52-79.

6. For characteristic discussions of Whitman's sexuality and poetry of the Civil War period, see Gay Wilson Allen, Walt Whitman Handbook (1946; repr., New York: Hendricks House, 1962), 162-72, and The Solitary Singer (1955; repr., with revisions, New York: New York University

Press, 1967), 337-43. Even Roger Asselineau's franker views follow the same discussion. See his The Evolution of Walt Whitman: The Creation of a Personality (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), 149-174. Among more recent scholarship, the traditional perspective is apparent in Stephen A. Black's Whitman's Journeys into Chaos: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Poetic Process (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 223-34. For examples of authors who are now calling for a reassessment of Drum-Taps, see Cady's "Drum-Taps and Homosexual Literature" and Betsy Erkkila's Whitman the Political Poet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 178-95.

7. Jimmie Killingsworth, "Whitman's Sexual Themes During a Decade of Revision: 1866-1876," in Walt Whitman Quarterly Review 6 (1989): 11.

8. W. Wynn Thomas, "Whitman and the American Democratic Identity Before and During the Civil War," Journal of American Studies (April 1981): 83.

9. Quoted in Erkkila, 179.

10. Walt Whitman Leaves of Grass (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860), 341-42.

11. Ibid., 347-48.

12. Ibid., 341.

13. Ibid., 365-66.

14. Ibid., 341.

15. Ibid., 374.

16. Ibid., 360; 377.

17. Ibid., 376.

18. Ibid., 363.

19. Ibid., 366.

20. Ibid., 371.

21. Ibid., 364-65.

22. Ibid., 356-57.
23. Ibid., 347.
24. Ibid., 351-52.
25. Ibid., 355-56.
26. Ibid., 375.
27. Ibid., 344-45.
28. Ibid., 357-58.
29. The Homosexual Tradition, 58.
30. Leaves 1860, 372-73.
31. Ibid., 377.
32. Ibid., 378.
33. E. Fred Carlisle's The Uncertain Self: Whitman's Drama of Identity (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1973), 128.
34. Leaves 1860, 361.
35. Ibid., 370.
36. Ibid., 349-51.
37. Ibid., 343.
38. Walt Whitman the Political Poet, 181.
39. Carla Maria Verdino-Süllwold and Thomas Hampson's "'The Frailest Leaves of Me": A Study of the Text and Music for Whitman's "To What You Said.'" Walt Whitman Quarterly Review 12:3 (Winter 1995): 133-149.
40. Michael Moon in Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 159.
41. For a discussion on Whitman's initial and then modified responses to the civil conflict, see Erkkila's Whitman the Political Poet, 190-201.

42. For a discussion of the composition and revision history of Drum-Taps, see Anthony Szczesiul's "The Maturing Vision of Walt Whitman's 1871 version of Drum-Taps" in The Walt Whitman Quarterly Review 6 (1989): 127-141.

43. Walt Whitman in Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps (1865) and Sequel to Drum-Taps (1865-6): a Facsimile Reproduction (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1959) 8.

44. Ibid., 7.

45. Walt Whitman in Leaves of Grass: Authoritative Texts, Prefaces, Whitman on his Art, Criticism (New York: Norton, 1973), 322-23.

46. Drum-Taps, 8.

47. Leaves Norton, 321-22.

48. Drum-Taps, 56.

49. Leaves Norton, 324.

50. Fone, 15.

51. Drum-Taps, 42-43.

52. Leaves Norton, 321.

53. Drum-Taps, 53-54.

54. Ibid., 42.

55. See Cady's "Drum-Taps and Nineteenth-Century Male Homosexual Literature," 49-60.

56. Erkkila, 220.

57. Drum-Taps, 39-40.

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